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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY (RR)  
TO THE ARMY FORCE ASSOCIATION ON SEPTEMBER 13, 1994

At the start of the Revolutionary War Thomas Paine wrote, "We have in our power to begin the world over again. Now we're at the end of the Civil War, and we have to begin our national security world again."

Last week, I was in Berlin for the ceremonies celebrating the departure of Allied Forces from the city after almost 50 years. And at the same time, more than a thousand miles to the East, the U.S. 3rd Infantry Division was in Russia conducting joint peacekeeping training with the Russian 27th Guards Motorized Rifle Division.

These two events, occurring simultaneously, certainly brought home to me how much the world has changed. We are beginning the world again.

But looking at the range of missions of American forces today, and visiting our enlisted personnel, NCOs and officers, it's clear to me that one thing hasn't changed and won't: It's that America's security still comes down to the courage, training, professionalism and morale of each individual man and woman in uniform.

When I go out to talk to the troops and their families, I often end my speeches by describing a painting that hangs in the hallway outside my office in the Pentagon. The painting depicts a poignant scene of a serviceman with his family in church. Clearly he is praying before deployment and long separation from his family. Below the painting is a wonderful inscription from Isaiah. In it, God says, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for me?" And Isaiah replies, "Here am I. Send me."

I like to remind people of this passage, because it so aptly describes the spirit and dedication of our armed forces. For years they have answered the call with, "Here am I; send me." Whether it be in Berlin, face to face with the Soviet Red Army, or today on the Korean DMZ, one of the world's tensest borders, they guard America's freedom and interests. The question I would like to address today is, How do we keep these people and, most significantly, what does this country owe them?

These are not simple questions. We are a society that offers smart young people a wide range of life choices. And the choice to serve in the Armed Forces -- to make the commitment and accept sacrifices to protect the nation's security, the ultimate form of patriotism -- is only one among many choices that young people have. And, with an all-volunteer system, a military that employs the highest technology and the most sophisticated tactics, we need to attract the highest quality people. We also must be able to keep them, because it takes a long time and a lot of training to get the level of expertise we need. For example, it takes about 29 weeks -- more than two years of intense training -- to become a maintenance crew chief of an F-16.

In short, in order to attract and retain smart, skilled people, the U.S. military needs to compete with all the other choices society offers. Today, we do. Our military is rich with bright, well-trained, highly professional and dedicated people. I see it everywhere I go, from the E-Ring in the Pentagon, to the DMZ in Korea, to the flight line at Aviano, to the troops watching the Macedonia border at Camp Able Sentry, to our forces responding to the tragedy in Rwanda, the crisis in Haiti and the exodus from Cuba.

And I'm not the only one who's seen it. Last summer, we took General Nikolayev, the Deputy Chief of the Russian General Staff, on a two-week tour of military bases all over the United States. As he looked at our facilities, he talked to servicemen and women all along the way. At first, he couldn't believe his eyes and ears. He thought that we had created some sort of an American Potemkin Village for his benefit -- that we had taken commissioned officers, put them in enlisted uniforms and put them on display. He later realized he was seeing the real thing; that the servicemen and women he met truly represented our military today. And he concluded that no military in the world has higher quality NCOs than the U.S. military, and that's why ours is the best in the world.

My most important task, since the day I was sworn in as Secretary of Defense, has been to maintain the high quality and morale of our people in uniform. This has been an enormous challenge as we complete the post-Cold War drawdown and build a force for the challenges of the new era. But if there is anything I'd like to be measured for at the end of my tenure, it's the quality of our forces. I inherited quality forces with high morale, and I want to pass them along to my successor.

As you know, Deputy Secretary John Deutch and I have decided to shift more funds in the five-year defense plan toward readiness activities, military pay increases and quality of life improvements for the troops. Let me stress that we're not talking about changing the Bottom-Up Review strategy or force structure. Nor are we talking about changing near-term programs that affect force capability. Moreover, there is nothing very revolutionary about this process. Every year we review and re-balance the five-year defense program, taking into account new circumstances and funding, and take a fresh look at each modernization program.

What is different now is that the tradeoff between people and systems has gotten sharper. Under current budget constraints, we can't support both at currently projected levels. Something's got to give. And I say our people in uniform have already given a great deal to our nation. We owe them a fair deal in return.

To quote the Air Force Association's own issue paper on manpower and personnel, "The men and women who have chosen to serve in our military services during the last 20-plus years have answered the call of freedom with effectiveness, honor, distinction and unwavering dedication. The All Volunteer Force should not be taken for granted -- it should be provided with benefits, living conditions, training and equipment commensurate with the awesome responsibility given to them."

Therein lies the answer to our question today. In order to attract and retain smart, skilled people, in order to compete with all the other choices society offers these people, we must provide our servicemen and women and their families the best quality of life possible.

What do we mean by quality of life? To me it falls into three general categories:

First, quality of life is the standard of living for service members and their families, which involves pay and benefits;

Second, it's the tempo of operations, or how often we send our people out on training, exercises or missions;

Third, it's the way we treat people; whether we treat them fairly when they're in the service and when they leave; whether we give people a fair chance to advance and excel.

All three add up to this: whether military service offers personal and professional growth, a decent life, and the rewards commensurate with the sacrifices made by our service members and their families.

Maintaining a good quality of life is not just the right thing to do, it's crucial to what I call "medium-term" readiness. Medium-term readiness, in my mind, is associated mostly with morale, what George C. Marshall called "the state of mind" of the forces.

You can get a sense of this state of mind by looking at recruiting and retention rates. So far, these rates are good. Enlistment propensity among America's youth is still very high, although it has eroded slightly because of publicity over the drawdown and reduced recruitment advertising budgets. And retention patterns remain consistent with historical patterns, so good people still want to reenlist. So in spite of the uncertainty, we've been able to maintain quality people and morale.

So then why am I concerned about medium-term readiness? Because with the pressure to cut the defense budget, service members and their commanders are concerned about quality of life issues. From my conversations with officers and enlisted men and women, it's clear that if we don't protect the quality of military life, morale in the forces -- and ultimately, readiness -- will suffer.

Pay and benefits have the biggest impact on morale. These include things like commissary privileges, housing and health care. Now, nobody joins the military to get rich. But nobody expects to take a vow of poverty, either. It's crucial that pay and other compensation remain competitive -- if not, morale will suffer, and we won't be able to recruit and retain the people we need.

However, military pay is part of the whole federal pay system. I'm just one of the people in the Administration who advise President Clinton on military pay. I'm not the deciding vote. I don't discuss in the press or public what I recommend to the President, but I will tell you that I care deeply about the issue. So let me assure you, I make my voice heard.

But I can control some of the other compensation and benefits, which in many ways are just as important as pay. The commissary system is a case in point. Commissaries help our people stretch their food dollars, and ensure that everybody -- no matter where they're stationed -- can feed their families well and within their budgets. We've studied ways to make this system more efficient, and I'm convinced there are ways to save money. But let me say this: I reject any proposal that lowers the quality, benefits and services being delivered. We will preserve the commissary benefit. We shouldn't nickel-and-dime our people when they buy groceries.

Our housing problem is going to be a tough nut to crack. This problem has developed over the past decade -- particularly, a shortage of housing for junior enlisted and junior officers. Every base commander and senior enlisted person I've talked to, when I asked what affects morale most at their bases, mentions housing as number one or number two. It's a problem that's developed as our military became more professional, our people stayed in the service longer, and more of our folks had families.

But the result is, we're sending more people off base into the economy for housing. In some areas, that works out OK. In most areas, it's a tremendous financial hardship for service members. In effect, people have to choose between living in inferior housing or living on less pay because their housing allowance is not enough to afford a decent place. We need to address this problem. For example, one possible solution we're looking into is to have private firms build housing on military bases and lease it to the military people at reasonable rates, as we've done in the past.

Health care is another major concern of our people. Our service members must be healthy and fit in order to respond at a moment's notice. This means they need the best in diagnosis, treatment and preventive medicine and advice. And while they're deployed, they shouldn't be distracted over whether their families are receiving proper medical care and attention.

But health care is also the most complex of our human resource issues. Short term, the allocation of health care services has been hurt by the turbulence of downsizing, with families in Europe suffering most. The larger challenge is to harmonize military health care with national health care reform, and to make defense health care efficient without sacrificing quality.

We're making some progress. In fact, we are leading the nation in health care reform with our TriCare military health plans. These team up all of the military medical providers in a region to give our people wider access, and cut overhead and duplication of services.

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I've just outlined a bundle of things to do. Many will cost a lot of money, and require some reductions in modernization programs. But let me reiterate: Every penny that we spend to maintain military quality of life is an investment in the readiness of the force.

There are also ways to protect morale that don't involve outlays, such as treating our people fairly. Fairness means fighting discrimination and ensuring equal opportunity. It means lifting barriers to service and promotion that have been denied to women. It means seeing that people get an adequate opportunity to advance, to be promoted. Fairness also means helping our people make a smooth transition to civilian life when they retire or leave the service

Protecting morale also means making sure we keep a reasonable personnel tempo so that service members can see their families more than occasionally. We owe it to our people to find a balance between the rigorous demands of training and operations, and the time they can spend at home. But the pressures on the budget, and the pressures created by the mission needs of the country, all move us in the opposite direction.

We've asked a lot of our people to meet higher personnel tempos because we have smaller forces while the number of missions seems to have increased. We need to take steps to make sure we don't stretch our forces too thin. So we are looking very, very hard at the requests that come in for the use of military forces, and weighing them critically. My pledge is to do everything I can to stay within the standards we set for the length of deployments.

I cannot overemphasize how important it is to treat our people right. A military is only as good as its people. Right now our people are enormously impressive-- sharp, professional, and highly respected wherever they go. They wear their uniforms with great pride. Treating them right is crucial to ensuring that America continues to have a ready, highly effective force.

And we owe it to them. After all, these are the men and women who, when the call comes, say, "Send me."

Thank you very much.

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